

Assault On A Former Friend

*A 15 year old boy assaulted a former friend
after being excluded from school.*

15 year old Darren and Josh attended the same large comprehensive school. Darren was not an academic boy, and was frequently in trouble whilst Josh came from a more privileged background and achieved well academically. Despite their differences, the two boys became good friends who were popular with their peers. However, a disagreement between the boys led to Darren being excluded (again) from school. Darren felt unfairly treated and waited for Josh outside school one day. Darren beat Josh so seriously that he needed treatment in Accident and Emergency. Darren found himself permanently excluded from school, appeared in Court and received a 3 month Action Plan Order. Back at school other boys were taking sides and there was quite clearly an incident waiting to happen. What was at an early stage bravado and empty threats could easily have turned into something worse.

The Victim's Story

It was at this stage that the Victim Liaison Officers from the Youth Offending Team (both trained mediators) became involved. They arranged to visit Josh and his dad to offer information and to talk through the options open to them. Both were aware of, and unhappy about, the underlying tension. Josh's dad was particularly worried that his son might be goaded to retaliate physically, which could lead to a criminal record. They agreed that some form of mediation could be useful, but that it was something for the boys themselves to participate in, rather than the parents, who did not know one another.

The Offender's Story

When Darren was visited, he was less articulate, but clearly shared similar worries to those of Josh and his dad. Darren and his dad were also aware that the feelings of their friends could escalate into another incident. Darren felt that his record would mean that he would have to shoulder the blame whatever happened. On the other hand, he no longer wanted to apologise as he felt that Josh and his friends had been aggravating the situation and making threats. The focus of the discussion changed. Darren's dad felt that a meeting between the boys could establish ground rules for future behaviour and take the sting out of neighbourhood rumours. He also felt that showing each boy the other's true state of mind would be useful and Darren agreed. Some time elapsed whilst Josh was on holiday, but he agreed to a meeting on the terms suggested by both parties on his return.

The Meeting

The meeting took place in a Community Centre half way between the homes of each boy. The boys needed little encouragement to talk frankly about the incident and its outcome and their underlying

concern for each other shone through. Josh admitted that he had been goading Darren before the fight and showed sorrow and concern that Darren could now not complete his education but was instead in a 'dead end job'. Darren said he enjoyed having wages and anyway, because of costs and compensation, he was in a position to pay his debts himself. Both boys were worried about the possibility of further 'aggro' from their friends. They agreed that they could do a lot to minimise risk by assuring everyone that the whole incident was now closed. They talked amicably for some minutes about their plans for the future and then drew up an agreement.

The Agreement

Because Darren and Josh had talked frankly they could put the past behind them and if they met they would both be able to say 'hello'. Darren apologised for what had happened and Josh apologised for aggravating the situation. They both left the meeting smiling.

The Outcome

About a month after the meeting, the Victim Liaison Officers did their formal follow up work. This follow up is designed to check that the work has been done professionally, and that there are no issues left over that need addressing. Josh and his dad were most enthusiastic and Josh's dad in particular felt this kind of work was a "really worthwhile use of public money". Darren demonstrated the success of the meeting by not coming to the attention of the Youth Offending Team again once his order was completed.